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General Assembly

Fifty-third Session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Monday, 16 November 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 20 *(continued)*

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/501)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/139)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/53/157, A/53/213, A/53/291, A/53/292, A/53/307, A/53/316, A/53/330, A/53/344, A/53/359, A/53/361, A/53/377, A/53/424, A/53/538)

Draft resolutions (A/53/L.26/Rev.2, L.27, L.29, L.30/Rev.1, L.3l, L.32, L.33, L.36)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/153)

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I would like to inform the Assembly that sub-item (c) of agenda item 20, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", will be considered together with agenda item 45 at a later date.

In connection with sub-item (b) of agenda item 20, eight draft resolutions have so far been submitted to the Assembly: A/53/L.26/Rev.2, entitled "International assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Nicaragua: aftermath of the war and natural disasters"; A/53/L.27, entitled "Assistance to Niger, which is severely affected by floods"; A/53/L.29, entitled "Special emergency assistance to the Comoros"; A/53/L.30/Rev.1, entitled "Assistance to Mozambique"; A/53/L.31, entitled "Assistance for humanitarian relief and the economic and social rehabilitation of Somalia"; A/53/L.32, entitled "International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan"; A/53/L.33, entitled "Assistance for the reconstruction and development of Djibouti"; and A/53/L.36, entitled "Assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia".

I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 30 September 1998 addressed to me, the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of September, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of Switzerland on agenda item 20, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian

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and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of Switzerland on this agenda item?

It was so decided.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Nicaragua to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.26/Rev.2.

Mr. Ortega Urbina (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is an honour for me to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/53/L.26/Rev.2, entitled "International assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Nicaragua: aftermath of the war and natural disasters", sponsored by Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Spain, the United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/53/291, which we consider to be very instructive and which reflects the achievements and difficulties of the transition process as our nation moves towards democracy. This process is manifest in the two latest democratic elections based on the popular will, the signing of the second structural adjustment programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the subsequent negotiations on external debt with the Paris Club.

The property problem persists, despite negotiations between the two main political parties to find a solution within the national dialogue promoted by the current Government. This dialogue is being coordinated by the non-governmental organization Ética y Transparencia with a view to organizing, coordinating and leading the meetings and drawing conclusions.

Human rights, which call for my Government's special attention, have been reinforced, on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by the promulgation of the Code for Children and Adolescents, which will go into effect this year on 22 November.

Strengthening the rule of law is one of my Government's priorities and has greatly facilitated the gradual process of reincorporating thousands of former combatants into civilian life. However, landmines, another aftermath of war, continue to be a problem in regions that were theatres of armed conflict, imperil the population and impede agriculture in productive areas of the country. Only 50 per cent of the mines laid during the war have been located. The Nicaraguan army, assisted by friendly countries and in cooperation with the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Defence Council, has found a partial solution to this problem. Much remains to be done, however, since, in addition to mines, countless explosive devices, such as bombs, fragmentation grenades, mortars and ammunition, remain in Nicaraguan soil. It is calculated that 85 to 90 per cent of the population affected by mines and other explosives are children between the ages of 8 and 12. This problem was exacerbated by hurricane Mitch, whose strong current and mud slides in certain areas moved these deadly devices to other sites.

The most recent of the natural disasters faced by Nicaragua was hurricane Mitch, which damaged 70 per cent of the country's infrastructure, killed more than 6,000 people and left over 5,000 missing. This tragedy came on top of the El Niño phenomenon, which also seriously affected the country's agricultural production, causing great losses by extending the 1997-1998 dry season and thus increasing the incidence of forest fires. Some 532,000 hectares of woodland were burnt, representing a tremendous loss of natural resources. It is therefore a matter of urgency to create in Nicaragua, with international technical assistance, a more efficient programme to prevent forest fires and mitigate their effects.

In early 1990, Nicaragua had an external debt balance of $10,715 million, which, by late 1997, had been reduced to just over $6 billion, or by 44 per cent. Nevertheless, it is beyond our economic capacities to service this remaining debt. Nicaragua's foreign trade was negative in 1997 and we continue to have negative balances abroad. The Government has directed its efforts towards implementing an agreement with the IMF on the basis of fiscal adjustments and structural reforms which, while stabilizing the economy and providing incentives for savings and investments, aims at laying the groundwork for our being considered for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

Despite the reduction of our debt, which I mentioned earlier, to slightly over half of its 1990 level, the debt still presents Nicaragua with short-term liquidity problems and medium- and long-term insolvency. Structural adjustment programmes and domestic austerity policies impose social costs on Nicaraguans that are too high for an impoverished people. This leads us to the conclusion that only through forgiveness or reduction of most of the debt can we return to the course of development. While current adjustment programmes help, they are inadequate for making our economy grow to sustainable levels to alleviate poverty and reverse the deterioration of our resources.

Even before the most recent hurricane, external debt servicing represented 40 per cent of the value of our exports. Poverty levels were the highest in our history and per capita consumption continued to fall. Socio-economic indicators continued to be negative and the investment levels necessary to generate growth that would make it possible to pay the external debt and improve the living conditions of the population were very limited. Now, in the post-hurricane Mitch period, the picture is infinitely more gloomy. Reviving Nicaragua economically requires the support of the international community in order to overcome and end the degree of poverty we are currently suffering and to arrive at the coming millennium with new perspectives that particularly benefit the most vulnerable sectors of our people.

The draft resolution we are introducing is designed to seek the support of all the Member States of the United Nations to permit Nicaragua to rebuild its infrastructure and place its economy on a sound basis in order to ensure the consolidation of peace and democracy in Nicaragua, the essential bases for sustainable development. It requests the Secretary-General, who in cooperation with the relevant organs and bodies of the United Nations system and in close cooperation with international financial authorities, to provide the necessary assistance for reconstruction of the country, its sustainable development and the protection of its biological diversity.

We hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by this General Assembly.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of the Sudan to introduce draft resolutions A/53/L.27, L.29, L.30/Rev.1 and L.36.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): As Chairman of the African Group this month, I have the honour to introduce to the General Assembly the draft resolutions adopted by the Group as a whole under agenda item 20 (b). The first, A/53/L.27, is on assistance to Niger, which is severely affected by floods. In addition to the African States, the following countries have adopted this draft resolution: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Chile, China, Cuba, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Vanuatu.

As you know, Niger belongs to the Sahelian geographic region, whose environment is unstable and subject to drought and desertification. This limits the economic activities of its inhabitants. The draft resolution is submitted to the Assembly for the first time as a result of loss of human lives and destruction caused by the recent severe flooding in Niger. The floods destroyed 6,000 homes, leaving about 30,000 people homeless. The draft resolution is in accordance with the appeal made by the Government of Niger last August for assistance for emergency operations and for the Government's national reconstruction efforts.

In the operative part of the draft resolution the General Assembly expresses its solidarity with and support for Niger. It calls upon all States, the specialized agencies and other agencies and organizations in the United Nations system, as well as the financial institutions and non-governmental organizations, to extend generous assistance to Niger in support of the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction operations and programmes it is undertaking, and requests the Secretary-General to coordinate these activities.

The draft resolution entitled "Special emergency assistance to the Comoros" is contained in document A/53/L.29. It is sponsored by Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, France, India, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Suriname, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as by African States. The preambular part of the text refers to resolution 51/30 F, in which the General Assembly noted that the Comoros had been subjected to external events beyond its control. The draft resolution notes that the political, economic and social trauma caused by those events are paralysing the economic activities of the Government, resulting in an economic crisis which has led to serious political consequences characterized by separatist tendencies which have threatened the territorial integrity and economic and social survival of the Comoros.

In the operative part of the draft resolution, the General Assembly expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General. It urges the international community to respond generously to the needs for urgent assistance to the Comoros as recommended by the humanitarian and technical assessment mission dispatched by the Secretary-General. It also urges the international community to grant to the Government of the Comoros all necessary assistance to enable it to cope with the country's humanitarian needs and economic recovery efforts. It also requests the Secretary-General to mobilize that assistance and to submit a report to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session in this regard.

Draft resolution A/53/L.30, on assistance to Mozambique, in addition to the African States, is sponsored by Jamaica, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Saint Lucia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The preamble refers to previous General Assembly resolutions wherein the international community was urged to respond effectively and generously to the call for assistance to Mozambique. It also refers to relevant resolutions on assistance in mine clearance. In the draft resolution, the General Assembly bears in mind that the current situation in the country requires substantial international assistance in a comprehensive and integrated manner linking, *inter alia*, resettlement to reintegration programmes. The draft resolution mentions the role played by States and United Nations institutions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in this regard.

In the operative part, the General Assembly welcomes the assistance rendered Mozambique, welcomes the progress made in restoring peace, tranquillity, democracy and national reconciliation in Mozambique and recognizes the efforts undertaken by the Government to promote national reconstruction. The resolution mentions that continued substantial coordinated assistance from the international community is necessary in order to meet the country's development needs. It welcomes the development assistance focused on rehabilitation of social services and infrastructure, investment in human capital and the mobilization of the private sector.

The resolution urges all States which can do so to contribute to mine clearance so as to enable the Government to develop national capacity in this regard. It requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize international assistance for the national reconstruction and development of Mozambique, to coordinate United Nations efforts to meet development needs and to submit a report on the implementation of this resolution to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

Next, I shall introduce draft resolution A/53/L.36, entitled "Assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia". Since the outbreak of the civil conflict in Liberia in December 1989, the General Assembly has adopted several resolutions for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of this country. It is important to recall in this regard that pursuant to the efforts undertaken by the Economic Community of West African States and that community's resolve to preserve peace and to continue the lending of assistance from the United Nations and the international community to that country in general, the people of Liberia last year were finally able to settle their conflict. That achievement was crowned by the holding of democratic elections, which took place on 19 July 1997.

The Secretary-General, in the report submitted to the General Assembly in document A/53/377, emphasizes, *inter alia*, that despite the rapid actions taken by President Charles Taylor in dealing with the difficult issues still pending with regard to the reconstruction of Liberia, the interest and support for Liberia shown during the conflict must be maintained so as to restore peace and achieve the goals of development to which its Government aspires.

Finally, the Group of African States hopes that the General Assembly will adopt these draft resolutions, as submitted, by consensus.

Now permit me to speak in my capacity as the Permanent Representative of the Sudan.

The delegation of the Sudan would like to draw the attention of delegates to the item on the strengthening of emergency assistance by the United Nations. In this regard, we appreciate the efforts made by the Economic and Social Council and the Secretary-General, which are reflected in the important documents they have submitted with regard to strengthening the response to the appeal for humanitarian assistance by the United Nations and to upgrading United Nations activities in that domain.

We should also acknowledge that consideration of this matter is taking on a special and increasing importance. This is due not only to the role of the United Nations in providing human solidarity in cases of relief in emergency situations — and we could hardly find a State that is immune from such situations. It is also

because the world witnesses today an increasing pattern of wars and regional, bilateral or internal conflicts, with all their human implications, including the dangers they pose for the civilian population who are the most likely victims. It should also be conceded that cases of instability are bound to increase because of the deteriorating economic and social situation of the majority of the world's peoples, especially those in the developing and the least developed countries. This is due to the acute imbalances in the rates of economic growth between the developing and developed countries, especially with regard to the quest of the developing countries to confront the challenges of globalization and such other new challenges.

It is now an established fact that to depend only on relief without finding radical solutions to the root causes of problems is bound to harm present and future development in the countries concerned. Moreover, the United Nations quest for reinforcing the coordination of human relief should be accompanied by a parallel and complementary effort to confront the economic and development imbalances between South and North, especially in view of the increasing recognition that most conflicts are rooted in insufficient or unbalanced development. Action by the United Nations to confront the deteriorating economic situation in the majority of the countries of the world undoubtedly constitutes the Organization's greatest contribution to tackling the root causes of these problems and to mitigating human catastrophes.

My delegation wishes to pay tribute to the increasing interest of the Economic and Social Council in humanitarian issues, manifested by its allocation of an important part of its deliberations to them. We regard the Council's participation in formulating the general guidelines for such humanitarian relief operations as an important and essential development in this respect. Undoubtedly it is important for the Council to emphasize the unbreakable link between the coordination of humanitarian relief and the financial resources needed to allow the United Nations to respond to humanitarian emergencies, based on the belief that it is of crucial importance to confront such situations quickly on the one hand, and to achieve rehabilitation and long-range development on the other.

In this respect, my delegation also wishes to point to the emphasis placed by the Economic and Social Council on the role of the Governments concerned and their primary responsibilities in organizing, coordinating and implementing humanitarian assistance in their own territories. This would require effective international cooperation with the countries concerned, within the framework of international and national laws. Such efforts would also require the common organizations, that is, the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to be neutral and to strictly respect the humanitarian goals and national laws.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to confirm the commitment on the part of all countries to provide safe and secure passage without impediments for humanitarian relief and to ensure the safety of relief workers.

My delegation wishes to welcome the steps taken so far to strengthen the coordination of relief efforts in a manner guaranteeing expeditious response to humanitarian crises. We hope that these efforts will focus primarily on having the resources serve the needs of those afflicted. It is also our hope that the different organizations would coordinate their activities, unifying their aims, and that the efforts to mitigate catastrophes would constitute an integral part of the strategy for sustainable development. My delegation, therefore, would like to point out the necessity for reinforcing the capabilities of the countries concerned with regard to early warning and relief preparation. The Economic and Social Council at its 1999 substantive session should give sufficient attention to that issue during its review of the activities that have taken place in the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. We would like to express our appreciation for the attention manifested recently by the Bretton Woods institutions with regard to the nexus between natural disasters and programmes for rehabilitation and development.

Next year will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In this context, my delegation wishes to pay tribute to the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and to its commitment to humanitarian law. We also commend the efforts of the national societies of the Red Crescent and Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. We suggest that the United Nations organize activities to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Convention, including the possibility of organizing a decade for the development of international humanitarian law.

My delegation again pays tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict.

As we consider the coordination of humanitarian relief, we must mention the fact that Sudan has continued

to work faithfully for the fulfilment of humanitarian objectives throughout the years of the war imposed on it. It has provided Operation Lifeline Sudan, of 1989, its fullest support and cooperation out of commitment to its national duties towards its citizens.

The success of that United Nations operation in the Sudan provides an impetus for replicating that prototype in other situations of conflict in various parts of the world. It is a model based on the principles and guidelines of transparency, neutrality, integrity, accountability and national sovereignty. Despite the fact that we are proud of our achievements in the humanitarian field and of our ceaseless cooperation with the international community in this field, my country accords top priority to the necessity of establishing a durable peace in the country and of arriving at a basic solution that secures peace and stability. That is reflected in the Government's several initiatives aimed at achieving a peaceful solution, including the signing in April last year of the Khartoum peace treaty with several of the armed factions, and the negotiations under the auspices of a Government committee for the fight against drought and desertification with the remaining faction. These efforts are based on the fact that peace is a strategic objective and a top priority.

There can be no development without peace. Our plans for peace are based on the necessity of sharing power and wealth and on respect for and expression of diversity. The federal regime aims to achieve those ambitions on the basis of making citizenship the basis of rights and responsibilities, regardless of ethnicity or belief. These bases and rules were laid down in the constitution adopted as a result of a national referendum. As of the beginning of next year, the political parties will begin their activities in accordance with that constitution.

Taking account of the human problems and the economic gap experienced in southern regions of the Sudan, especially in Bahr el Ghazal, the Government took unprecedented steps and measures regarding humanitarian assistance, as attested to by the United Nations Secretary-General. These measures included opening up all of the areas in the south to relief activities and the authorization of an unprecedented number of flights. Work has also begun from the El Obeid base to serve the affected populations in the areas controlled by the Government as well as in the areas of insurrection. This is particularly important considering that the use of the El Obeid airport gives the operations economic viability, because is it close to the affected areas in the Bahr el Ghazal region.

The Government continues to mobilize resources from fraternal and friendly States for relief needs. It also continues to mobilize resources through what has been called the "appeal for returnees". Many sectors of the Sudanese people have contributed housing, food and great financial resources.

Work is proceeding apace to facilitate the certification and movement of those who work for United Nations agencies, voluntary organizations and international agencies, including authorization for the United Nations to utilize the communications equipment it had requested to facilitate its humanitarian operations. These measures have also included resumption by the Red Cross of its operations and the rendering to it of all requisite facilities. Authorization is also granted on a continuing basis for trips by foreign representatives, including officials, journalists and representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations who have gone to the Sudan, especially to the rebel areas, on fact-finding missions and to make a special assessment of the plight of women and children and all those afflicted, especially in the field of immunization and combating epidemic diseases. This is contrary to what the insurrection movement has done in terms of impeding access to those afflicted in the rebel areas, taxing the needy and appropriating relief supplies for use by its combatants.

The Sudan confirms that it is making every effort to resolve the problems and establish the peace priorities. It will continue to work with the international community, the United Nations and all governmental and non-governmental organizations in those relief operations and in guaranteeing that that relief reaches those who are suffering from those conditions.

My country has often underlined the need for observing a comprehensive ceasefire. That will continue to be our aim. My country has confirmed that, and it wishes to cooperate with all bodies that work for relief, rehabilitation and development. Transport should be provided in addition to aeroplanes, so that the relief effort can achieve its objective. In this respect, my delegation wishes to thank the international community and the United Nations and its bodies and agencies, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations. We hope that they will redouble their efforts, especially given the consequences of the floods and the unexpected rainfall that have affected the country.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Kazakhstan to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.32.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): On behalf of the 41 sponsors listed in document A/53/L.32, I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled "International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan". The delegations of Croatia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Germany, India, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have also joined the sponsors of the draft resolution.

As the draft resolution indicates, the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground, inherited by Kazakhstan and closed in 1991, has become a matter of serious concern for the people and the Government of Kazakhstan with regard to its consequences for the lives and health of the people, especially children and other vulnerable groups, as well as for the environment of the region.

The draft resolution emphasizes that the international community should pay more attention to the human, ecological and socio-economic dimensions of the situation in the Semipalatinsk region. It recognizes the need to coordinate national and international efforts aimed at the rehabilitation of the health of the affected population and the environment in the region, and also the need for know-how in minimizing and mitigating these problems.

In implementation of resolution 52/169 M, adopted at the fifty-second session of the Assembly, an inter-agency mission was organized with the participation of representatives of United Nations specialized agencies and programmes and experts from a number of Member States, who conducted a comprehensive study of the consequences of the many years of nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan.

With assistance from States Members of the United Nations — the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Japan — and also from organizations of the United Nations system, more than 20 international experts on radiation, health, economic recovery, environment and humanitarian assistance were invited to take part in the mission. During their stay in Kazakhstan, these international experts worked together with a group of between 25 and 50 national experts.

The United Nations mission conducted a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the tests on the situation and needs of the population of the Semipalatinsk region in four spheres, namely, environment, health, economic recovery and humanitarian assistance. The conclusions and recommendations of the mission are contained in the report of the Secretary-General, document A/53/424, and its annex, submitted for the Assembly's consideration. The Secretary-General's report emphasizes that the United Nations should assist the Government of Kazakhstan to establish an adequate coordination mechanism for the planning and implementation of future and ongoing assistance.

In the operative paragraphs of draft resolution A/53/L.32, the General Assembly takes note of the report of the Secretary-General and the conclusions and recommendations contained therein, which constitute a useful input to the elaboration of an overall action plan to solve the health, ecological, economic and humanitarian problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region. In this connection, the draft resolution stresses the need for greater international attention to the problems of the Semipalatinsk region and its population and for extra efforts by the international community to solve them.

The draft resolution also urges the international community to provide assistance in the formulation and implementation of special programmes and projects, and also invites all States, relevant multilateral organizations and other entities of the international community, including non-governmental organizations, to share their knowledge and experience in order to contribute to the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region. In addition, the draft resolution invites the Secretary-General, in coordination with the relevant agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, to continue to concern himself with the implementation of the draft resolution and to report to the General Assembly, at its fifty-fifth session, on the human, ecological and economic situation of the Semipalatinsk region, under the agenda item entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

The leadership of Kazakhstan is sincerely grateful to all Member States, to the Secretary-General and to the specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations for the support extended to Kazakhstan in overcoming the consequences of the nuclear tests

inherited from the past and in preparing the comprehensive report on the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region.

On behalf of the Government of Kazakhstan, I wish to thank the representatives of all the sponsors for their support for draft resolution A/53/L.32 and, on their behalf, to propose that it be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated country, Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland align themselves with this statement.

Let me, first and foremost, add my voice to those who expressed their sentiments for the victims of the appalling disasters, some of them termed the worst natural disasters in this century, which have swept over various regions of the world in recent months, as cruelly demonstrated most recently by the devastation left behind by hurricane Mitch. Most of these disasters have struck developing countries and added considerably to existing social and economic difficulties. Recovery and rehabilitation efforts will be a daunting task for all, and for some, beyond the national capacity to achieve. Assistance from the international community, and the role of the United Nations — in particular the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in advocating and coordinating assistance — will be of crucial importance.

Allow me, to take this opportunity to welcome the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and to note the impressive activities he has already undertaken to implement the Secretary-General's reforms in the humanitarian field and to strengthen the profile of his Office in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The work done by OCHA so far bears strong testimony to the soundness of the Secretary-General's endeavours to focus its activities on coordination, policy development and advocacy. We fully support this task of coordination that, with the collaboration of all agencies involved, strengthens the efficiency of humanitarian action.

We are appalled by the extent of the suffering of entire populations brought about by conflicts waged around the world and, in particular, the utter disregard for civilians. Not only have situations where no distinction is made between combatants and non-combatants become commonplace, but civilians and, in particular, women and children, most affected because of their sex and their status in society, have become deliberate targets of war efforts, subjected to abhorrent practices. We have to reverse this trend.

We are also deeply concerned about the plight of refugees and about the growing number of internally displaced persons. In this context, we welcome the guiding principles on internal displacement issued by the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Mr. Francis M. Deng, and supported by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

The European Union shares the Secretary-General's concern regarding the continuous erosion of respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, in particular for the Geneva Conventions and the principles set out in resolution 46/182. We condemn deliberate attacks on civilian populations and the denial of the basic right to receive humanitarian assistance. We reiterate that humanitarian assistance has to be granted safe, unhindered and non-discriminatory access, and that both the civilian population and humanitarian personnel have to be adequately protected.

United Nations humanitarian agencies report that more and more of their staff are working in areas designated as insecure. The number of people in need who may have died because it was impossible to provide aid on account of the security situation cannot be estimated. The increased risk of humanitarian work relates to several factors characteristic of present-day conflicts: the economic value of relief, its impact upon the dynamics of conflict, political gains from aggression against relief workers, and the possibility of obtaining ransom money. It is the nature of contemporary conflict that lies at the root of the problem. Measures to address this problem might have to be innovative, but they are not beyond the international community's grasp.

The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which the European Union worked so hard to achieve, is a significant step forward towards bringing to justice the perpetrators of the most heinous crimes and towards putting an end to a culture of impunity. At the same time, the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court over individuals will promote the greater accountability of State and non-State actors alike, thus contributing to the reestablishment of

peace and to the promotion of the rule of law. The European Union is pleased to note that the list of war crimes contained in the Statute of the Court also includes attacks intentionally directed against humanitarian or peacekeeping personnel. The European Union considers the adoption of the Statute a milestone achievement, and once again urges all Member States to speedily sign and ratify the Statute in order for the Court to come into operation as soon as possible.

The involvement of children in armed conflict is an item of critical concern on the international agenda. We are unreservedly convinced that children must play no part in warfare. In this regard, the European Union strongly supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, who continuously seeks to draw international attention to the horrendous plight of children affected by armed conflict. We welcome his efforts to cooperate with all relevant United Nations entities and to place this issue within the mainstream of United Nations policies in conflict management, humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation. The promotion of the physical and psychological recovery and the social reintegration of girls and boys constitutes an essential element of humanitarian assistance. To make these efforts effective, it is also necessary to gender-sensitize humanitarian personnel working with children.

Equal access and full participation by women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the promotion and maintenance of peace and security. We also have to intensify our efforts to engage a wider segment of civil society in raising awareness and respect for international humanitarian law and principles. The fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions next year should be an occasion to gain greater support in these areas.

We have taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/501) submitted pursuant, *inter alia*, to resolution 52/167. While the report contains a useful overview of the present situation, it is disappointing that it does not attack the roots of humanitarian insecurity or provide a review of existing security arrangements, and particularly that it does not address, as requested, the needs of non-governmental organizations. We encourage the Secretary-General to go further in addressing these issues and assure him once again of our full support in that effort.

It is in this context that the European Union is again sponsoring a draft resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, which has been merged with a draft resolution on the protection of United Nations personnel. The two equivalent texts adopted at the fifty-second session were resolutions 52/167 and 52/126.

The European Union attaches great importance to the consideration by the Economic and Social Council of issues of coordination of humanitarian activities. We therefore welcome the first humanitarian segment of the Council and endorse the useful outcome last July. We will cooperate actively with the Emergency Relief Coordinator to implement the conclusions agreed upon at the segment.

While the first humanitarian segment was successful, there can be further improvements in the future. We should aim to find a specific and sufficiently well defined theme for each segment in order to focus our discussion and to adopt operative conclusions. At the same time, we should find more innovative and interactive elements in the discussion to ensure a stimulating dialogue among Governments, the United Nations system and practitioners in the field, including in the community of non-governmental organizations. We consider it important that the humanitarian segment should continue to pay particular attention to the work done at the field level, which is likely to remain a challenge to OCHA and to United Nations agencies delivering humanitarian assistance.

The European Union recognizes the important role of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee with respect to effective inter-agency coordination of humanitarian activities. We note that at its last meeting the Standing Committee recognized that coordination efforts are improving and that they are ongoing at all levels. The European Union commends these developments and looks forward to increased transparency in this work, *inter alia* through regular briefings by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and by OCHA.

The European Union shares the Secretary-General's concern about the decline in the international response to appeals for humanitarian assistance. This development has to be considered in an integrated fashion, but it is clear that greater efforts are needed to meet the requirements set out in consolidated appeals. The European Union contributes the largest share, namely half of all humanitarian assistance, be it multilateral or bilateral; in 1997 this amounted to $690 million. We urge

that the basis for the financing of consolidated appeals be broadened to include both traditional and non-traditional donors.

We note the statement that the prioritization of needs in the consolidated appeals has improved considerably. The consolidated appeals should, however, be more strategic, even more prioritized, timely, and realistic in outlay and budgeting, and they should take into account programmes already being implemented by the donor community at large. European Union member States and the European Commission are ready to participate in the preparation of consolidated appeals with a view to improving their usefulness. We also stress the need to evaluate humanitarian activities and to include provisions to this effect in the consolidated appeals.

The Union fully shares the Secretary-General's concern about OCHA's funding situation. It is clearly wrong that a core function of the United Nation — namely coordination of humanitarian affairs — is not fully funded from the regular budget. The European Union has made its views on this situation known to the Secretary-General and has urged that this anomaly be redressed as soon as possible. The General Assembly should take concrete action to finance OCHA's core requirements from the regular budget in the next few years. The Union, in this context, calls upon the Secretary-General to reflect such a strategy in the proposed budget outline for the next biennium.

Next year the Economic and Social Council, as agreed in the humanitarian segment, and the General Assembly will discuss the future of advocacy and awareness-raising for disaster prevention and reduction within the United Nations system, after the conclusion of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, in line with the recent decision of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the Decade, which calls for a concerted and coordinated inter-agency approach to reducing the adverse impact of natural disasters in the twenty-first century. The Decade has been successful in putting disaster reduction on the agenda of United Nations agencies and other international, regional and national bodies. The discussion next year will no longer focus on whether disaster reduction is useful, but rather on how to carry out the disaster reduction function effectively at the global scale and as a core component of sustainable development strategies at all levels. The discussion will also focus on how the United Nations system can most effectively advance work on disaster reduction.

The European Union is concerned by the growing number of natural disasters and environmental emergencies which often strike countries that lack the resources to cope with them adequately. The link between natural disaster mitigation at the country level and development is evident. The new role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in this area is therefore welcome, particularly in national and local capacity-building in developing countries. OCHA and UNDP are encouraged to work closely together to ensure greater synergy between operational activities for disaster mitigation, preparedness and response.

The European Union welcomes the Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions with regard to the relief/development gap and the ongoing follow-up activities in intergovernmental forums and in the United Nations system. However, we have to expand our understanding that relief efforts must be a step towards development and that they must be delivered in ways that promote rather than compromise long-term development objectives. What is needed to fill the relief/development gap is not a linear process from relief to development assistance, but rather partnerships in which actors from each group bring to bear, as early as possible, the full range of their expertise and capacity on the appropriate aspects of the rehabilitation problem.

Mr. Albin (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The strengthening of humanitarian assistance is one of the fundamental priorities of our Organization. This area of activity represents a direct potential benefit for millions of people who are affected by natural disasters and other catastrophes each year, particularly in developing countries. The General Assembly recognized this high priority and enshrined the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance in resolution 46/182. That resolution is both a plan of action and a standard of conduct for the deployment of the broadest possible international solidarity.

Mexico shares the international concern about the problem of the safety and security of humanitarian workers. The security of personnel is a key element for ensuring the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which will end next year, and the international actions that we have launched this year in response to the El Niño meteorological phenomenon have made it possible for us to forge an increasing and unified awareness and to pool our concrete efforts in major

collective undertakings. We believe that the General Assembly should provide follow-up and continuity in this important humanitarian endeavour, taking into account the experience that has been gained. We must ensure that the right balance is struck between emergency assistance at the moment when natural disasters strike and long-term undertakings, which include national, regional and international capacity-building in the areas of prevention and response to such disasters. It is necessary to ensure that appropriate efforts are made and that our cooperation activities are properly integrated in the emergency, rehabilitation and development phases.

Humanitarian assistance is an international cooperation activity that involves everyone. Natural disasters have no regard for borders. Nor does solidarity, an inherent quality of human beings, pay heed to geographical boundaries.

It is extremely important to properly assess the role of developing countries in the humanitarian endeavour, not only as aid recipients but also as active contributors to the extent of their abilities.

This is how the people and the Government of Mexico have always acted. This is shown, for example, by the record of solidarity between Mexico and the peoples of the world in the face of destructive earthquakes and our history of fraternal support for other countries in their time of need.

In Latin America this year my country has participated in humanitarian assistance activities in Peru — donating 18 tons of medicine to provide support to the population affected by El Niño. When Cochabamba, Bolivia, was struck by an earthquake we provided a brigade from the Mexican army composed of doctors, nurses and first aid personnel; as well as a canine team to search for survivors under the rubble, 10 tons of medicine, food, rubble-clearing equipment, a seismograph and a mobile hospital.

We also provided timely support for the countries of the Caribbean following the ravages of hurricane Georges. Our solidarity with the countries of Latin America that have been overcome by the fury of hurricane Mitch — a human tragedy of terrifying proportions — was prompt.

The impact of hurricane Mitch in Central America has resulted in thousands of deaths and millions of victims who today are without shelter, sustenance, drinking water, food or medical attention. They are isolated in their tragedy by the massive destruction of roads and means of communication. The economic infrastructure and sectors of production have been devastated, including the capacity to produce foodstuffs and basic commodities.

There is a vital and pressing need for the broadest possible solidarity of the international community. We must pool our various capacities and resources to come to the aid of the peoples of Central America in this emergency. It is equally important to continue our support for the tasks of rehabilitation and development.

Upon learning of the scale of the disasters in Central America, Mr. Ernesto Zedillo, the President of Mexico, immediately ordered the mobilization of our assistance effort to respond to the needs of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Mexico's assistance to emergency activities includes 28 helicopters, 16 aeroplanes, and 2 ships and the deployment of specialized relief and rescue brigades. Our assistance also includes 1,300 tons of food, 16 water purification plants and 64 technicians to operate them, 54 tons of medicine, 5 epidemiologists, 108 technical experts specialized in cholera and malaria and 32 pieces of heavy machinery, as well as engineers and builders. A first hospital ship carrying personnel and specialized medical equipment has already set course for Honduras.

The President of Mexico — echoing the appeal made by the Presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua — has also approached various world leaders, including, of course, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to emphasize the need to immediately organize a major international operation to provide relief to the populations hit by hurricane Mitch and to keep this human tragedy from worsening, which threatens thousands of families with the ravages of famine and epidemics. There is no doubt that the leadership of the Secretary-General is decisive in coordinating the swift, coherent and efficient deployment of international efforts — both during the emergency and in the arduous work of reconstruction.

In this same spirit, the wife of the President of Mexico, Mrs. Nilda Patricia Velasco de Zedillo, appealed to the people of Mexico for a national collection in support of the Central American countries affected by the hurricane, under the slogan "Mexico for Central America".

In recent decades, the peoples of Central America, with international support, have worked resolutely and steadfastly to lay the foundation for the economic and

social development in an environment of peace, justice and democracy. The Central Americans have always shown strength and integrity in the face of adversity. Without question they will overcome this fresh ordeal.

However, the situation requires the States Members of the United Nations actively to participate so as to ensure that these courageous peoples' hopes and achievements — the fruit of years of sacrifice and perseverance — are not threatened by the short-lived but devastating onslaught of the hurricane.

Mexico continues to lend its full support, to the utmost extent of its national capacity, to these countries, with which we are bound by history, culture and ties of friendship.

Mr. Bohaievs'ky (Ukraine): While preparing this statement, we read the texts of the resolutions on humanitarian assistance which the General Assembly has adopted in recent years. We were impressed by the increasing number of emergency situations in different parts of the world caused by natural and other disasters. Even at this session of the General Assembly the first two resolutions were of a humanitarian nature, while traditionally, as we all remember, we used to start with adopting resolutions on cooperation between the United Nations and other international organizations in this field.

The reports of the Secretary-General on the item under consideration show very clearly that the problems related to humanitarian relief cut across the entire spectrum of United Nations activities, including issues relating to human rights, peacekeeping, sanctions, the observance of legally binding instruments, post-conflict rehabilitation and development. Furthermore, we are witnessing the advent of an increasingly complex environment in which a more effective international response is required.

We have to admit that, although today the Organization seems to be much better prepared to meet the new challenges in this field, its capacity to respond to some emergency situations caused by natural disasters is essentially limited due to a lack of adequate resources and the further erosion of respect for humanitarian principles.

These alarming trends call for an urgent and comprehensive reconsideration of approaches to humanitarian situations, especially in countries where action by the international community should take full account of durable recovery, peace-building, respect of human rights and the need to ensure sustainable development.

In this context, we must positively assess the United Nations reform of the humanitarian sector, in particular the establishment of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and clearly identify its functions and its practical methods of work.

Since his appointment in January 1998 as head of this new Office, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, has succeeded in focusing the attention of his Office, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs on the most acute humanitarian issues. We would like to wish Mr. De Mello further success in this important endeavour.

This is also a good opportunity for us to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. De Mello for his constant attention to, and efforts towards, resolving the complex of Chernobyl-related problems. We sincerely hope that his recent visits to the site of the disaster and to the affected areas in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation will contribute to strengthening international cooperation in mitigating the consequences of this, the most tragic technological catastrophe in the history of humankind. It is also appropriate to convey our appreciation to Mr. De Mello's predecessor, Mr. Yasushi Akashi, in particular for organizing the United Nations inter-agency needs assessment mission to the affected areas and for elaborating the related programme of action.

Coordination of humanitarian assistance within the United Nations system received the most careful consideration of the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session, and I do not think that we need to reopen the debate on this issue at the General Assembly. We must rather ensure the follow-up to the Agreed Conclusions adopted by the Council at its humanitarian segment during that session.

In the field of humanitarian relief efforts within the United Nations system, we believe that it is necessary to continue to form a more effective and more economical organizational system while ensuring its unique universal nature and capacity to respond to the needs of all groups of countries. It is particularly important to secure effective coordination among the different agencies involved in order to strengthen the early warning function

of the United Nations system and its consolidated appeal process, and to reinforce the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

As Ukraine's representatives have stated on many occasions, our country attaches great importance to the issues of safety and security of staff and protection of humanitarian assistance. We share the deep concern of the Secretary-General, expressed in his report (A/53/501), at the considerable deterioration of conditions in which United Nations personnel are operating, and the level of risk they are facing. Our delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's determination to improve the security situation of staff and fully supports the measures already taken to this end and those proposed in his report. In particular, the suggestion of the Secretary-General to develop international legal machinery in order to find and seize the assets of the transgressors deserves our most careful consideration. Such a mechanism could strengthen the authority of the Convention on the Safety of the United Nations and Associated Personnel, which is a very important instrument aimed at protecting staff members and providing a more secure environment for their humanitarian operations. We support the Secretary-General's appeal to all States which have not done so to become parties to this Convention, which would expedite its entry into force.

The delegation of Ukraine is also very supportive of the initiative concerning the need for a greater degree of involvement by the United Nations Security Council in issues pertaining to the protection of humanitarian assistance. Recent open consideration by the Security Council of the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has demonstrated the ability of this body to bridge the gap between security problems and humanitarian situations, both during conflicts and in post-conflict situations.

This brings me to another important issue: the humanitarian and economic effects of sanctions imposed by the Security Council. The United Nations has broad enough experience to evaluate both the positive and negative consequences of this mechanism. It is therefore imperative to identify very clearly the purposes and conditions of, and the tools for, the imposition and elimination of sanctions, as well as ways of avoiding their negative impact on third countries.

We have raised this issue a number of times. However, we are doing so again today because we have not seen any serious progress.

The Government of Ukraine is gradually increasing its national capacity to respond to emergencies at home and outside the country. Since the establishment in 1996 of the Ministry for Emergencies, Ukraine's representatives and the Ministry's experts have been involved in a number of international humanitarian efforts, providing assistance to various States in situations of natural and other disasters. In 1997 the Ministry for Emergencies of Ukraine rendered financial and material assistance to the Governments of Poland, Moldova, Georgia and Hungary when there were emergency situations in these neighbouring States.

I also take this opportunity to inform the delegates about the disaster that occurred quite recently in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. It was caused by heavy rains that started on 6 November and significantly increased the level of water in the basin of the very turbulent Tisa river. As a result, 118 towns and villages and about 400,000 people have been affected by floods. Approximately 25,000 people have been evacuated to safe areas. More than 35,000 houses were damaged by the floods, 1,129 of which were totally destroyed. A great many bridges and roads have been destroyed or seriously damaged, and 100,000 hectares of agricultural land have been covered in deep water.

In this situation, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has responded very effectively to the request of the Government of Ukraine and has put into operation its emergency-response system and appealed to the international community to provide relief assistance to the flood-stricken areas of my country. My Government has authorized me to express on its behalf our deep gratitude to OCHA for a prompt and effective response that has allowed for the mitigation of the sufferings of numerous victims of this natural disaster.

Our most sincere thanks go also to the Governments of Hungary, Slovakia, Switzerland, Italy, Poland and other States, as well as to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, for their generous assistance and support in overcoming this disaster. We are very hopeful that other countries will join this relief effort.

Although the situation is very serious, our delegation has no intention of proposing to the General Assembly a formal decision calling for urgent international humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, because we believe that even the most well-drafted resolution cannot guarantee the immediate reaction of the world

community to the sufferings of the people. We are very grateful that OCHA has already disseminated a very important international appeal.

At the same time, we think that in cases of emergencies, the primary obligation of the United Nations system in the humanitarian field is to help the Governments of the Member States to overcome these emergencies in the most effective manner.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. I would like to take this opportunity to make a few observations.

Over the past year or so, under the leadership of Mr. Vieira de Mello, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs have carried out effective deployment and coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected countries and countries in emergency situations. Focusing on its three core functions, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has made progress in handling several key aspects of humanitarian affairs. We express our appreciation for this. China has always attached great importance to United Nations efforts in this field and will continue to offer its active support.

The Chinese delegation would like to take this opportunity to stress that humanitarian law and principles must be respected and the protection of civilians, women and children in particular, in armed conflicts must be ensured. The security of humanitarian assistance personnel must be guaranteed, so as to enable them to carry out their work safely and without impediment. Efforts to advocate for humanitarian law and principles and for other related international norms should be strengthened, and studies should be carried out on effective and feasible measures.

The Chinese delegation believes that resources are a key issue in the present humanitarian field. Timely and effective relief activities and disaster-alleviation and prevention capabilities depend on having the required money and materials ready for use. Nobody can prepare a meal without foodstuffs. We believe that at present the consolidated inter-agency appeals process is an effective instrument for raising money and for coordinating efforts. Countries should increase their support for it and change the current situation in which there is a lack of active response to the appeals. The international community, the developed countries and, in particular, countries with capabilities should understand and support the efforts of countries in difficulty that are committed to overcoming their emergency situations and to reconstructing their homelands; they should help these countries get over their difficulties and make progress towards development as soon as possible.

The high frequency and unpredictability of emergencies and natural disasters have added to the difficulty of providing humanitarian assistance and of raising money, while the urgent nature of these disasters has made the relief activities of the international community and the coordinating function of OCHA more crucial. Therefore, we believe that along with continuing the coordinating role of the consolidated appeals process in fund-raising, stronger efforts should be made to study and develop further the standby arrangements and rapid-response mechanisms in order to make them more operational through gradual improvement, thus enabling the United Nations to promptly mobilize personnel, funds and relief materials and effect a rapid response.

Experiences in recent years have shown fully the importance of strengthened inter-agency cooperation so as to carry out well-coordinated, rapid and effective humanitarian relief operations. Therefore, we welcome the broad participation of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization and other agencies and organizations, so that their expertise and strengths can be used to address different needs of the recipient countries and regions in a well-targeted manner, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the relief activities. In this regard, the resident coordinators of the United Nations and resident representatives of the agencies can and should play an important role.

We appreciate the coordinating efforts made over the past year by OCHA and other relevant agencies in providing relief assistance to countries devastated by natural disasters. At the same time, we also attach great importance to and support the scientific research and technical cooperation that is being carried out by various countries and relevant agencies in the fields of early-warning systems, disaster alleviation and prevention, and environmental management. These efforts are a very important aspect of the scientific component of disaster prevention and relief, and they provide guidance for effective relief activities. China would like to contribute to these efforts.

In the summer of this year China experienced floods of extraordinary magnitudes — magnitudes rarely seen in history. The Chinese Government has taken every possible emergency measure to help fight the floods and resettle people displaced by the disaster. The international community, including the United Nations, provided China with valuable assistance at the critical moment. This provided a very important boost to morale which helped the disaster-affected people get over their difficulties. I would like to take this opportunity to express our most sincere gratitude to the countries, United Nations organs, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and friends of all walks of life that provided valuable assistance to China in this very difficult emergency situation. Our most sincere gratitude also goes to the Secretary-General and the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Vieira de Mello, for the emergency humanitarian assistance arrangements made for China's disastrous floods.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express on behalf of my delegation my most extreme thanks and appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the presentation of his report in document A/53/153. We also wish to express our appreciation to the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, for his efforts and for the primary role played by his Office in facilitating and coordinating the work of the United Nations agencies in providing assistance to the Palestinian people.

Our Palestinian people highly appreciate the meritorious efforts of the international community aimed at ameliorating our plight and helping us build and rehabilitate our institutions and homeland through feasible economic and social development. In this respect, we wish to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to the donor countries for their valuable contribution, continued assistance and support, despite the obstructions placed by Israel.

Meanwhile, a meeting of donor countries is scheduled to take place in Washington on 30 November under the auspices of President Bill Clinton, with the participation of President Yasser Arafat. On this occasion, we wish to appeal to the international community, and to the donor countries in particular, to effectively participate in this meeting at the ministerial level. We believe that the contributions and support needed to help Palestine in its development in the next five years should be well defined.

In this respect, we cannot fail to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the international community, especially the two sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, to salvage that process and achieve concrete progress at all levels, which will have positive implications for the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people.

In this context, we wish to refer to the efforts of the American President and his Administration that were crowned with success by the signing of the Wye River Memorandum at the White House in Washington on 23 October 1998. We call on the Israeli Government to unconditionally and fully commit itself to implementing what it had signed without any delay or prevarication, and to immediately cease its illegal practices and policies, in particular the expanding and building of settlements, the confiscation of territories, demolishing houses, the Judaization of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the withdrawal of identity cards of its citizens in order to impose an artificial demographic composition and an administrative situation in the Holy City. Implementing the outstanding provisions of the Interim Agreement, as contained in the Wye River Memorandum, without any prevarication or delay, will have a great impact on the living and economic conditions of our people.

The implementation of the second and third stages of the Israeli withdrawal, operating the airport and safe corridor and building the port and the industrial areas, will enable our people to evolve its national economy and set it free of economic strangulation, closure, and isolation and will provide it access to outside markets away from the Israeli impediments and obstacles.

Israel's commitment to the implementation of the agreements concluded, to international law and to ending the policies of siege and collective punishment is an essential condition for the salvaging and success of the peace process and for ending the suffering of the Palestinian people. As we confirm the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the Palestinian issue, we also wish to stress the importance of the United Nations role in providing assistance to the Palestinian people. We would also like to emphasize the importance of the role played by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories and the need for its reinforcement.

This year we will use the language adopted in all of the United Nations resolutions to refer to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem — not only

because this is the correct language, but also because some have attempted to exploit the previous status in order to cause harm to our national interest. This included trying to embroil the United Nations Secretariat and its reports in this issue, thus attempting to create new practices in the United Nations. We do hope that this draft resolution will also be adopted by consensus, and if that proves difficult, then by an overwhelming majority.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Since the General Assembly addressed this agenda item a little less than a year ago, the world has seen many developments on the humanitarian front, both negative and positive.

On the negative side, disasters of unprecedented magnitude befell many parts of the world this year. Floods in China and Bangladesh and hurricanes in the Caribbean and Central America, left tremendous human suffering in their wake. Japan has provided aid in money, kind and personnel to countries hit by hurricane Mitch, including the emergency team dispatched for medicare and sanitary assistance to Honduras.

I should like to reaffirm the commitment of my country to providing the utmost support for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Effective coordination of international relief activities is all the more necessary when disasters are on such a large scale.

Conflicts still plague many parts of the world, particularly Africa, giving rise to the urgent need for humanitarian activities and efforts to solve refugee problems. An increasing number of these conflicts are taking place within the borders of a State, rather than between States. As a result, the world is facing the growing problem of internally displaced persons, in addition to that of refugees.

The last 12 months also have seen an unprecedented increase in security incidents involving humanitarian personnel from the United Nations and other organizations. From many areas affected by conflicts — Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, and Tajikistan — we have received tragic reports of humanitarian personnel being attacked, abducted, even murdered. In these past twelve months, the number of civilian casualties the United Nations is reported to have suffered has exceeded the number of its military casualties.

On the positive side, the international community has taken steps to better equip itself to meet growing humanitarian needs. Japan wishes to express its appreciation to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for working to enhance coordination of the humanitarian assistance offered by the United Nations. Japan is also pleased that the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council session was initiated last summer. The Security Council, too, held discussions on the matter of the security and safety of humanitarian personnel in May last year and returned to the subject this year in September. The first Periodical Meeting on International Humanitarian Law was convened by the Government of Switzerland in January in Geneva.

I should like now to touch upon some of the recent Japanese initiatives to facilitate humanitarian assistance.

First, in relation to the draft resolution on the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, Japan has actively been extending support to the region, including assistance to those affected by radiation. So far, the aid provided has consisted of initiatives taken by individual countries, but they have not always been coordinated. Japan therefore welcomes the report of the Secretary-General recommending a consultative process in the form of a meeting or conference and commends the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for its initiative in organizing a mission to grasp the situation in Semipalatinsk. Having reflected on the modality of further support, as well as on our own experiences and the suggestions of experts, we have come to believe that those countries and non-governmental organizations that have responded to the situation in the Semipalatinsk region, as well as to the Chernobyl disaster, should share what they have learned. To promote effective and efficient international support, Japan is ready to host a conference or symposium in cooperation with the relevant United Nations bodies, such as UNDP, and the Government of Kazakhstan at the earliest possible date next year, and it hopes shortly to consult with the Government of Kazakhstan, as well as with the relevant United Nations bodies and organizations, to that end.

Another initiative Japan has taken to promote cooperation and coordination in the field of humanitarian assistance is the fourth Afghanistan Support Group meeting, which it will host in Tokyo next month and which will be attended by representatives of United Nations bodies and organizations, including the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We hope that the Group, by maintaining close coordination with the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and other relevant United

Nations organizations, will play an important role in finding a way to embark upon humanitarian activities in a country where they are badly needed.

Thirdly, allow me to refer to the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) process. Five years after the first meeting, TICAD II was held last month, with the participation of 80 countries, including 51 from Africa, and representatives of 40 international organizations, including the Secretary-General.

One of the important features of the TICAD II process is the effort to increase awareness of the link between development and conflict prevention. Without development, we cannot expect to be effective in preventing conflicts, and when conflicts are prolonged, we cannot hope for stable development. Conflicts, or even the fear of conflict, can derail humanitarian activities. It is for this reason that the Tokyo Agenda for Action identifies good governance, conflict prevention and post-conflict development as the basic foundations for development. The Agenda reflects the readiness of Africa's development partners to support emergency and post-conflict relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction and development, and thereby facilitate the transition from emergency relief to development assistance.

Concerning the security of humanitarian personnel, we have seen some progress in consolidating a legal framework, including the establishment of the International Criminal Court in July. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court clearly states that an attack against personnel involved in a humanitarian assistance mission may constitute a war crime. I should like to take this opportunity to appeal once again to those States that have not yet done so to join the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. It should be noted that efforts to ensure the safety and security of United Nations and other personnel will also help enhance the security of persons in need of assistance. The establishment of the Trust Fund for Security of United Nations personnel is another particularly encouraging development, as it will help to protect civilian personnel. Japan plans to make a contribution of $1 million to the Fund in the strong hope that effective training and counselling can reduce security incidents involving humanitarian personnel. In this connection, I should like to announce that Japan is joining the initiative of the European Union and becoming a sponsor of the draft resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

I should like to conclude by reiterating Japan's support for strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Since coordination requires budgetary support, is it not high time for the United Nations to increase the portion of the regular budget that it allocates to this increasingly important part of its mandate?

Mr. Shamsudin (Malaysia): My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his reports. They provide us with a good basis for our deliberation on this item in this Assembly today.

My delegation also wishes to extend its sympathy to the Governments and peoples of those countries which have recently been severely affected by hurricane Mitch.

The Economic and Social Council, at its most recent substantive session, devoted the humanitarian segment to the item entitled "Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance". The discussions and informal dialogue held during this segment between delegations and those representing the United Nations and other organizations have helped in many ways to enhance our collective understanding of the problems, challenges and possible solutions relating to humanitarian issues. The outcome of the discussions, which was documented in the form of agreed conclusions adopted by consensus, provides us with a useful framework that will further guide the work of the relevant components of the United Nations system on humanitarian efforts in a coordinated way. My delegation welcomes the adoption of the agreed conclusions.

Malaysia had earlier welcomed the measures taken by the Secretary-General to enhance humanitarian coordination by replacing the overburdened Department of Humanitarian Affairs with a more highly focused Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The Secretary-General has also created a special Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs, reporting directly to his office, to enhance complementarity between and among other United Nations departments and the development and humanitarian organizations. We certainly concur with the view that the reform measures can and should contribute to an increase in the efficiency of the United Nations in carrying out humanitarian activities.

Malaysia fully supports the effort by OCHA to focus on the three core functions, namely policy development and coordination, advocacy of humanitarian issues and

coordination of humanitarian emergency response. Malaysia welcomes the streamlining of the functions of the various offices of United Nations agencies, with OCHA as the focal point for information exchange and coordination of the United Nations response to humanitarian situations. We believe that these measures will help further strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of United Nations response to humanitarian needs in emergency situations across the globe in a more coordinated way.

My delegation notes with keen interest the establishment and working of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), headed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, whose members include the heads of United Nations operational agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization. We see the IASC as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination on issues pertaining to humanitarian emergencies and needs.

We are glad that the IASC is able to advise and make crucial recommendations to the Secretary-General on important steps or measures to be taken vis-à-vis often complex and complicated humanitarian issues. While recognizing the difficult task of the IASC, my delegation hopes that it will continue to work towards achieving more coherent coordination at the field level by providing a clear division of responsibilities among the different operational agencies involved. In this regard, Malaysia welcomes the proposal to enhance efforts to clarify the parameters of authority and functions for the United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinators, including the establishment of criteria and procedures and specific training and performance review mechanisms for humanitarian coordinators. This is of crucial importance to ensure that there not be inter-agency rivalry in the field. My delegation believes that there are many past experiences and good practices from which lessons could be drawn on this matter.

Malaysia also believes that the designation of the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the focal point for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) is most appropriate. We note with satisfaction the adoption by the IASC of the guiding principles on IDPs. At the Economic and Social Council session, my delegation expressed the hope that the United Nations would disseminate the document as widely as possible to all others concerned, including Governments.

Malaysia supports the call by the Secretary-General for a principled and coordinated approach to humanitarian assistance, especially in areas of conflict. A lot still needs to be done in this regard. The international community has to come to a clear understanding of certain basic points which deserve our collective attention, as follows.

First, all combatants in conflict areas must abide by universal humanitarian principles. Attacks on civilian populations, particularly women, children and relief workers, undermine the basic conditions of humanitarian assistance. Second, all parties to a conflict must adhere to human rights norms. Combatants should be held liable to their victims under international law, including financially, in instances in which civilians are made the deliberate targets of aggression. Third, the rights of refugees and displaced persons must be respected. Where there is a massive influx of people in need of asylum, immediate measures should be taken to separate the civilians from combatants. To facilitate this effort, an international mechanism should be created to assist host Governments in maintaining the security and neutrality of refugee camps and settlements. Fourth, humanitarian assistance should not be regarded as a substitute for appropriate political action by Member States and regional organizations. The purposes of humanitarian operations, therefore, must be clearly understood and constantly emphasized. And fifth, humanitarian assistance is not to be abused and used to prolong conflict.

Malaysia believes that humanitarian assistance should not be regarded only as a measure for temporary relief. Humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, including special economic assistance, must involve long-term rehabilitation and development. The main goal of these efforts must be to ensure that emergency relief contributes to future development. We firmly believe that equitable and sustainable economic and social development remains the best protection against the outbreak of conflict and disaster.

In the case of natural disasters, it is of utmost importance for the United Nations to have the means and resources to assist disaster-prone countries incorporate disaster prevention and preparedness into their overall development plans. In the case of conflict situations, obviously the international community must not lose its commitment to finding ways and means to resolve emerging conflicts in a peaceful manner through preventive measures.

With regard to possible natural disasters, the importance of a timely and effective early warning system is self-evident, in order to avert or mitigate losses and protect resources. Given the lack of resources, many developing countries are unable to strengthen their national capacities in this area, resulting in immense losses and damage. It is therefore crucial that the United Nations include this element as part of its humanitarian and disaster relief assistance programmes. We also believe that countries with sophisticated and effective early warning systems have a crucial role to play in providing adequate and timely information to allow developing countries to prepare for impending disasters.

My delegation believes that the search for a durable solution to the question of refugees and displaced persons must continue. The principle of burden-sharing is pertinent for successful voluntary repatriation of refugees. It has long been clear to all of us that good governance and the rule of law, the protection of fundamental human rights, the maintenance of peace and security within and between States, the promotion of sustainable development and rapid international deployment of humanitarian assistance are important in stemming the flow of refugees and preventing the creation of displaced persons.

Therefore, it is crucial that the international community focus on these issues as they relate to humanitarian assistance. The United Nations could do more in helping to create awareness and understanding through seminars, workshops and information campaigns. Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations could assist in this regard.

Obtaining adequate financial resources to address humanitarian issues remains crucial. Since the bulk of funds for humanitarian assistance are contributions, a more solid funding base is essential. This means that contributions should be made on a timely basis, that they be relatively predictable and that earmarking be kept to reasonable levels. Malaysia commends those donor countries which have continuously contributed funds generously. For our part, we will continue, within our means, to contribute both bilaterally and through multilateral channels, as appropriate.

In his report, the Secretary-General has raised concerns regarding the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. He observes that there has been a dramatic escalation of attacks on United Nations personnel involved in humanitarian missions. My delegation concurs that such attacks, which sometimes have resulted in the loss of life, should not be tolerated. The perpetrators must be held accountable and brought to justice. Malaysia calls on all those concerned to ensure that the safety and security of all United Nations personnel are fully guaranteed while they carry out their mandated humanitarian missions.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to pay tribute to all humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel who have selflessly dedicated themselves to humanitarian efforts around the world. Often they have to work under very difficult and threatening circumstances. It would therefore be most fitting that they receive the recognition they deserve for their courage, commitment and dedication at the close of this second millennium.

Mr. Sharma (India): My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for the reports which are under discussion today. They are comprehensive and respond to the importance that the international community attaches to the crucial issue of humanitarian assistance. India also accords the highest importance to the provision by the United Nations system of humanitarian assistance to those in need, in accordance with the guiding principles so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. These principles are valid and time-tested and should continue to be observed. In our view, humanitarian assistance must continue to be based on neutrality, impartiality and full respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States; it must be provided with the consent of the affected countries and on their appeal; and it must respect the primacy of the role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. My delegation would support all humanitarian activities under the United Nations aegis within these parameters.

Despite its resource constraints, India also provides humanitarian assistance, in the spirit of South-South solidarity, to those affected by natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies. Some of the recent examples are those of our assistance to the people of Afghanistan, Palestine, Mozambique, Bangladesh and the Central American and Caribbean countries which suffered devastating hurricanes last month. We are, however, deeply concerned to note that the levels of funding for humanitarian assistance have been declining over the last few years, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of programme requirements. Last year, my delegation highlighted that, while the need for humanitarian assistance has increased, the response of the international community has not been proportionate or adequate. This concern has only increased during the past year, with

some of the appeals being funded at as low a level as 8.6 per cent of the overall requirements. There is therefore an urgent need to ensure provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance, while ensuring, at the same time, that such resources are additional to, and not diverted from, the already scarce resources for development. The perception that this decline could be related to the political significance of crises or levels of media interest also needs to be addressed.

We therefore strongly support the proposal of the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive review of the funding of humanitarian programmes, including, *inter alia*, the relationship between funding provided for emergencies and resources made available for development programming. We believe that consolidated reports by the humanitarian affairs coordinator on the implications of underfunding, including forced changes in priorities and cancellation of activities, would be an important first step in this direction.

In this climate of shrinking resource flows, it is essential to ensure optimal and effective utilization of available funds. Capacities existing in developing countries, which are often available closer to the site of a natural disaster or other humanitarian emergency, and therefore at a lower cost, could provide a viable modality for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of limited resources. This was one of the main recommendations emanating from the agreed conclusions of the first humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, organized earlier this year, and was also reiterated by the heads of State or Government attending the recent summit of the Non-Aligned Movement at Durban, convened in August 1998. Existing structures for disaster mitigation and relief assistance in developing countries could also be fruitfully utilized to provide training to humanitarian personnel.

We welcomed and actively participated in the first humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council earlier this year. We strongly support the agreed conclusions adopted at the segment and trust that their full implementation will improve, qualitatively and quantitatively, our response to humanitarian emergencies.

We have noted several actions that have been implemented to reform the humanitarian sector of the United Nations. We welcome the streamlining of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to engage the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in proactive and collaborative efforts to deal with a limited number of key issues. We are, however, concerned that the lack of predictable resources for OCHA, over 60 per cent of whose costs are still funded from extrabudgetary resources, may somewhat curtail its effectiveness.

We have noted the options available for enhanced field level coordination arrangements. We would stress that all such arrangements must be made in full consultation with the recipient Government, whose involvement in all phases of humanitarian assistance is crucial for a satisfactory outcome. We therefore welcome the close involvement of the national authorities of the recipient countries in the consolidated appeal process, which will reflect the genuine needs of each case. We also hope that closer involvement of donors in the preparation of consolidated appeals will fulfil the expectation of a timely and adequate response when the appeal is actually launched. If the priorities for programmes of humanitarian assistance within each consolidated appeal are established in this cooperative manner, we trust that adequate and unearmarked funds will be increasingly available for their implementation.

While responding to complex humanitarian emergencies, which carry with them the potential of attracting public interest, we should bear in mind that the vast majority of emergencies to which the international community is called upon to respond relate to natural disasters. These, sadly, afflict mostly those countries which have the least capacity to cope with them. We welcome the emphasis in the Secretary-General's report on this aspect of humanitarian relief. We compliment the work undertaken by the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams so far and trust that these capacities will be strengthened.

It would be useful to have more information on the efforts being made to develop capacities enabling development agencies to work in what are called "failed" or "weak" States, as mentioned in paragraph 72 of the report in document A/53/139, although these terms lack precision.

We have noted the dilemma of relief and development linkage outlined in the report. We believe that a comprehensive approach that links relief and development is required to close the relief/development gap. We would like to stress that eradication of poverty through sustained socio-economic development offers the best opportunity of breaking through the vicious cycles of underdevelopment, conflict and misery.

We would also like to stress that the response of the United Nations system to humanitarian emergencies should not blur the distinctions among the various United Nations agencies or override the requirements, desires or wishes of sovereign Governments. Clear distinctions need to be made in defining the relationship between functions and imperatives of peacekeeping and peacemaking and the principles of humanitarian access. The distinction may be a fine one, but it is, nevertheless, both valid and crucial. The importance of this distinction was also stressed at the last summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Durban.

We are therefore concerned to find from recent reports that activities undertaken in response to humanitarian emergencies have extended to areas such as conflict prevention and resolution. It has also been indicated that there is a need to explore further the potential contribution of some humanitarian actors in preventive action, particularly in the humanitarian and development fields. These concepts have not yet received intergovernmental acceptance. If the United Nations system acts on them without mandates, that may complicate and detract from the task of providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies.

My delegation would also caution against the reports and discussions on the resolutions under this agenda item becoming a mechanism for the seeming acceptance of ideas that are still evolving in other forums.

I would now like to refer briefly to the agenda item on assistance to the Palestinian people. We have noted the efforts of the Special Coordinator focused on coordination of donor-funded projects, provision of budgetary support to the Palestinian National Authority and strengthening of institution-building programmes. India, despite its own limitations, has been contributing to the process of assistance to the Palestinian people, through scholarships and cultural exchange programmes. We have also increased to 56 the number of specialized training slots offered during the period April 1998 to March 1999. All expenditure on training costs, including board and lodging, is borne by the Government of India.

India also pledged $1 million at the Washington donor conference in October 1995 and another $1 million at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996. These pledges are being utilized both for the provision of goods and for undertaking projects in the Palestinian National Authority territory, including the construction of a library and activity centre at the Palestinian technical college at Deir el-Balah and the construction of a library at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza, as well as for supply of books. India has also offered to set up a common facility centre for training in vocational activities, such as software development, computer programming and computerized numerical control (CNC) machines.

During the visit of President Arafat to India in November 1997, a memorandum of understanding on bilateral cooperation between India and the Palestinian National Authority was concluded, which provides a framework for structured cooperation in diverse areas.

Although we will take up the issue of Afghanistan at a later stage, I should like to say that the humanitarian situation there is assuming serious proportions. With the onset of winter it will become even more difficult to deliver aid to the needy and poor in Afghanistan, and immediate steps in this direction are therefore required. For its part, India is committed to extending humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. For the past several years we have provided this assistance, both bilaterally and through the United Nations. In January last year, at a United Nations-sponsored conference in Ashgabat, India pledged $800,000 worth of humanitarian assistance.

In keeping with the recommendation contained in the Secretary-General's report, we have also decided to pledge humanitarian assistance worth 40 million rupees — about $1 million — against the 1998 United Nations Consolidated Appeal for Afghanistan. In addition, this year India sent a consignment of 15 tons of medicine, as suggested by the World Health Organization, and, in April and October, two consignments of medicine to the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health. A consignment of 30 tons of vegetable oil was also sent in August this year, and further consignments of foodstuffs, medicine and woollen clothing are envisaged for the coming months. Separately, we also sent 17 tons of relief supplies for the victims of the earthquake in February 1998 and a planeload of relief supplies for the victims of a second earthquake in June 1998.

We note from paragraph 77 of the Secretary General's report in document A/53/346 that "Afghanistan has all the ingredients for the worst case scenario of a complex emergency", including "intervening neighbours with vested interests". We have also noted the constraints on humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan brought out in the Secretary-General's report and hope that these will soon be overcome.

I wish to convey my delegation's deep appreciation and admiration for the dedication and commitment with

which many relief and assistance organizations and United Nations and non-United Nations personnel are functioning, under the most difficult and trying conditions, in bringing succour to those in need. They often work under daily threats to their own personal safety and security and deserve our unstinted praise. The threats faced by humanitarian personnel as well as United Nations staff have been clearly brought out in the Secretary-General's report in document A/53/501. We are concerned that these have shown an increasing trend. We salute those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the promotion of our causes and hope that such cases will become rare and, hopefully, cease in the years to come.

We welcome the establishment by the Secretary-General of a Trust Fund for Security of the United Nations system staff in the field and are actively considering contributing to it. At the same time, we have also noted from paragraph 26 of the report in document A/53/501 that a perceived loss of impartially and neutrality, especially of humanitarian action, can contribute to the increased insecurity of personnel. In the same paragraph, the Secretary-General also notes that actions by the United Nations or by a Member State in one part of the world could increase the insecurity of United Nations personnel in other areas. These issues need to be adequately addressed.

Increasing the awareness of humanitarian personnel including, *inter alia*, the need for them to respect the national laws of the countries in which they are operating, will contribute to ensuring the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian operations. We have also noted with concern that the restrictions on travel of United Nations staff members of certain nationalities imposed by the United States continue to remain in force, as indicated in paragraph 73 of the same report.

Before I conclude, permit me to commend the continued efforts of the United Nations system, despite the uncertain resource position, to bring relief and assistance to those in need in several parts of the world. Its actions have served to underline the predominant and central role of the United Nations in coordination of humanitarian assistance. We are convinced that the reforms of the United Nations in the humanitarian sector would further enhance its ability to respond to the emerging needs, and, within our abilities, we would be willing and ready to contribute to these efforts.

We have co-sponsored all the resolutions that have been submitted for consideration by the General Assembly today and trust that their unanimous adoption will demonstrate the will of the international community to contribute to the efforts of these countries towards rehabilitation and recovery.

Mr. Lee See-young (Republic of Korea) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset allow me, on behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, to express my thanks to the Secretary-General for his thorough and comprehensive report on the issue under consideration, and also for his continued and tireless efforts to strengthen the coordination of emergency humanitarian relief assistance of the United Nations. In particular, my Government welcomes the establishment, early this year, of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the designation in January 1998 of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello as Under-Secretary-General and as Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The unfortunate plight of refugees and the need for humanitarian assistance have not diminished with the end of the cold war. On the contrary, the international community is now witnessing increased threats to civilian populations and unremitting and flagrant violations of the basic principles humanitarian law. This is a tragedy for the whole world, because, as we stand at the threshold of the next millennium, it is clear that the world is still in the grip of war and armed conflict.

Furthermore, the violence engendered in these conflicts knows no bounds, mercilessly targeting vulnerable groups of civilians and humanitarian workers, who are often abducted or brutally attacked. Worst of all is the fact that those attacks are not the unfortunate consequence of conflict, but rather deliberate acts committed against this sector of the population. The aim of such acts is to terrorize civilian populations into submission and to intimidate the international community, thereby impeding the execution of political projects. This state of affairs is intolerable and cannot be allowed to continue. Therefore, my Government believes firmly that the international community must take immediate and effective measures to end violations of international humanitarian law and principles.

In this connection, in May last year during our presidency of the Security Council, the Republic of Korea initiated a debate on the protection of humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in armed conflicts. Therefore, we particularly welcome the recent report of the Secretary-General in response to the statement of the President of the Security Council on this subject. We are also pleased to note the subsequent debate in the Council that took place last September. In fact, the content of the

Secretary-General's report is closely linked to the mandate of this Assembly. In our view, the General Assembly should pursue the debate on the protection of humanitarian assistance, including implementation of resolution 52/167 on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

We hope that, in the future, the International Criminal Court (ICC) will be able to play a deterrent role in preventing violations of humanitarian law thereby enhancing the security of United Nations humanitarian operations. The Republic of Korea has actively participated in the negotiation process in Rome with a view to ensuring that the ICC Statute covers acts committed against humanitarian assistance, such as attacks on personnel, equipment, vehicles or mobile units engaged in providing humanitarian assistance. This type of offence should be classified as a war crime, an area over which the ICC has jurisdiction.

My delegation urges Governments and parties that are in complex humanitarian emergency situations to ensure safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid personnel, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international and national law, to enable them effectively to perform tasks.

One of the most tragic aspects of armed conflicts today is the tactic of using children as deliberate targets of violent attacks. This horror calls for a special response from the international community.

In this regard, we take note of the continued efforts of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and we fully support the presidential statement of the Security Council adopted last June, which condemned the targeting of children in conflict situations.

The international community must direct its attention to another humanitarian tragedy of our time, the situation of people displaced within their own countries. There are approximately 20 million such people, and their plight remains precarious and is often neglected because of political sensitivities and the difficulties of obtaining access to them. The United Nations definitely has a role to play in protecting and providing needed relief to these populations. In this respect, we note with satisfaction the appointment of the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the individual responsible for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance to displaced persons. On the basis of the principles established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), we hope that the Coordinator will effectively bring about improvements in coordination in order to strengthen humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons. We would add that, in order to achieve this, the collaboration and coordination of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies should be strengthened not only at the IASC level but also in the field.

My delegation considers that there is a need to establish a clear link between humanitarian coordination and long-term development, since the phases of relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development are not consecutive, but overlap and take place simultaneously. Thus, my delegation fully supports the comprehensive approach of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to recovery and its efforts to identify priorities more holistically in addressing the problems of countries in crisis. In our discussion on how to strengthen coordination among the various agencies, my delegation would like to underline the following points:

First, in order most efficiently to make use of limited resources, close cooperation between OCHA and the funds and programmes should be established. Furthermore, the Consolidated Appeal Process should be fully utilized as the main instrument for resource mobilization.

Secondly, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the IASC should step up its efforts to promote accountability and to clearly define the respective mandates of the funds and programmes concerned. The reporting procedure should be improved through the establishment of a common indicator of progress. Furthermore, the monitoring and evaluation procedures should be strengthened to ensure that assistance can reach the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Enhanced transparency would also contribute to the efforts to mobilize additional resources.

Thirdly, the role and functions of the Humanitarian Coordinators or Resident Coordinators are of the utmost importance in improving coordination in the field. The establishment of selection criteria and procedures, as well as mechanisms to review performance and to strengthen training of these Coordinators, should be further pursued and enhanced in order to strengthen their ability to operate in all kinds of circumstances.

Fourthly, the Republic of Korea wishes to congratulate the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) on, and support it in, its new mandates concerning natural disasters. Although natural disasters cannot be prevented, it is nonetheless possible, through preparedness, to mitigate their impact. There are far too many cases in which the consequences of natural disasters were magnified as a result of poor management of the ecological and industrial environment. In such cases, it is neither useful nor easy to make a distinction between natural and environmental disasters. We take the view that national Governments and their partners in the development process need to strengthen and improve the structure of local agriculture and forestry, in order to withstand adverse natural conditions.

Because of its own experiences of post-war recovery and development, the Republic of Korea is well aware of the tremendous importance of the linkage between emergency relief and long-term development. We have always been absolutely committed to the cause of United Nation emergency humanitarian assistance, and I assure the Assembly of my Government's resolve to continue to contribute to the achievement of this common goal of the international community.

Ms. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): Humanitarian emergencies continue to have an important place on the agenda of the United Nations. The vast majority of these disasters have struck developing countries and have contributed to further worsening already difficult circumstances in many of those countries. Providing humanitarian assistance must therefore remain a priority task of the international community. We welcome in this connection the role played by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and commend the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, for the dynamic and efficient way in which he has tackled the difficult task of implementing the Secretary-General's reforms in the field of humanitarian assistance in order to prepare his Office for its new role, which focuses on coordination, policy development and advocacy. The manner in which reform measures have been translated into concrete action has in our view led to a clear improvement in the humanitarian assistance undertaken by the United Nations system and to a strengthening of the role of OCHA within that system. We would like to reiterate in this context that the activities of OCHA should be fully funded from within the regular budget of the Organization, since the Office is entrusted with one of the core functions of the United Nations. We will nonetheless continue to make voluntary contributions to the humanitarian activities of the United Nations.

Among the most negative and troublesome developments in connection with humanitarian assistance are the increasingly difficult and dangerous circumstances under which such assistance has to be provided. The character of armed conflicts has changed noticeably in the recent past, and we deplore the targeting of civilians and the abuse of humanitarian assistance for political purposes, which have become widespread. It is of utmost importance for the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance that such acts be combatted efficiently and that the safety of humanitarian personnel be guaranteed. Lack of security remains a factor which can seriously compromise humanitarian operations, and it therefore needs to be addressed as a priority. We appreciate the fact that the question of the protection of humanitarian assistance was discussed in an open debate in the Security Council on 29 September 1998; this constitutes an important step.

The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which includes attacks intentionally directed against humanitarian or peacekeeping personnel among war crimes was a significant step. We are confident that the Court will play a major role both in bringing the perpetrators of such crimes to justice and, perhaps more important, in preventing the commission of such crimes. It goes without saying that the early entry into force of the Statute is indispensable for achieving this goal. Other measures will be necessary, and enhanced respect for and full compliance with international humanitarian law both by States and by non-State actors clearly constitute a key element in this respect. The fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which we will celebrate next year, will offer a very welcome opportunity to address this issue.

The involvement of children in armed conflict is the focus of increased attention from the international community, and we fully welcome this important development. We appreciate the work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict and hope that the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on this issue can soon be finalized as a major contribution to alleviating the plight of children worldwide.

When it comes to the prevention of conflicts, women still do not have equal access and full participation. My delegation would like to stress that women need to be fully involved at all levels in preventive diplomacy.

It is clear that protection for humanitarian assistance poses many complex questions to which we have to find answers in order to ensure the effectiveness of such assistance in the future. The report submitted by the Secretary-General on this issue (S/1998/883) constitutes a very good basis for tackling this important question.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): As I speak in the General Assembly on agenda item 20 (a), "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations", I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all for the expression solidarity to Bangladesh at a time when the worst floods in history overwhelmed us. In the very first resolution of the current session of the Assembly, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods", the entire membership of the United Nations expressed sympathy and support to Bangladesh. It called on the international community and the United Nations system to come forward in the effort to overcome the unprecedented disaster we faced. For us, this has been a source of a great inspiration and reassurance.

Our appreciation goes also to the Secretary-General for the urgent steps he took to mobilize humanitarian assistance and to coordinate activities of the United Nations agencies in the field and unified assistance by the international community.

The provision of humanitarian assistance was achieved with a remarkable degree of coordination, both bilaterally from donor countries and from multilateral sources. We are now devoting all our energies to recovering from the devastating impact of the floods. We hope that the international community will be forthcoming in our ongoing rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts with the same degree of support it demonstrated as we faced the emergency situation.

The report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/53/139) offers an effective and in-depth analysis of the current state of humanitarian assistance. Bangladesh welcomes the introduction of a separate humanitarian affairs segment at this year's substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. This provided us with an opportunity for substantial participation, and for putting forward many of our observations.

We note with satisfaction that the report indicates that there has been a steady decline over the last four years in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance. We hope that this trend will continue, but the recent experiences in Central America, China and Bangladesh, as well as in other parts of the world, remind us that there is no room for complacency. We need to keep adequately prepared for unforeseen events and to cope with unprecedented exigencies. Our experience reaffirms that with timely and coordinated intervention the adverse effects of a natural or environmental disaster can be minimized to a large extent.

We are concerned, however, that the concept of humanitarianism is under scrutiny, despite the demonstrated effectiveness of targeted humanitarian intervention. The debate on the outcome of humanitarian assistance is welcome, but it should not provide an excuse for inaction in the face of desperate need. We are alarmed that there has been a serious reduction in funding to humanitarian organizations in the past few years as a result of cutbacks in donor support. It is paradoxical that at a time when the utilization of resources is proving to be most effective, there has been a growing reluctance in the international community to intervene in situations requiring humanitarian assistance.

The report points to a number of causes for this current trend of declining interest in humanitarian assistance. Many desperate emergencies can no longer attract front-page media coverage due to reduced political significance. It is very unfortunate for humanitarian response to be guided by political priorities and not driven by need assessments. Resource constraint is already having a direct impact on beneficiaries. If this trend continues, it is bound to have negative impacts not only on attempts to improve the humanitarian situation, but also on stability and the overall effort for conflict resolution and peace-building.

We are encouraged by the attention the Secretary-General has given to the humanitarian sector in the United Nations reform exercise. We believe that the restructuring of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will enhance overall coordination. We welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to have OCHA focus on three core functions: namely, policy development and coordination, advocacy of humanitarian issues and coordination of humanitarian emergency response. We hope that this arrangement will result in improved support to the operational agencies, enhanced emergency preparedness and strengthened United Nations advocacy for humanitarian issues. We trust that the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the head of OCHA will result in a significant improvement in the effectiveness of the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

I would like to mention a few points of particular interest to my delegation.

We would like to underscore the need for adequate funding for humanitarian activities. The recent lack of funding should not result in a change of priorities. Every effort should be to facilitate the trend of reducing the number of crisis victims.

There has been a rapid decline in the resources available to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance. In view of the Fund's use as a reserve for immediate response to a natural disaster, we would hope that donors will come forward to replenish it to meet unexpected crises.

In instituting economic sanctions and trade embargoes, the effect on the vulnerable segment of the civilian population must be kept in mind. The aim of sanctions should be targeted against the regime under question. The Security Council will need to devise ways to target sanctions in such a way that the intention is achieved without causing suffering and distress to helpless people.

A sound financial basis for OCHA should be ensured. In this regard the Secretary-General should explore all possibilities to ensure funding from predictable sources.

Humanitarian assistance should not be driven solely by political priorities or the degree of interest taken by the media. Assistance should be responsive to the more objective basis of the victims' needs.

We are pleased to learn of the commitment to improve the accountability and standards of humanitarian action. We would like to be updated on the outcomes of lessons-learned studies undertaken by OCHA, through suitable briefing sessions.

The need for achieving greater coordination of humanitarian activities in the field cannot be overstated. Significant improvement has occurred in recent years, but there is room for further progress. We hope that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee will identify the required steps and take all the measures necessary to enhance coordination.

The Consolidated Appeals Process is the principal tool of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and of humanitarian coordinators in the field for combating a crisis situation. It has already been proved effective and should be further refined. It should be seen as a process in its entirety, from strategic programming to combating crises through close monitoring and evaluation.

A comprehensive peace-building strategy that involves national authorities, civil society and external stakeholders should be put together for those countries which are emerging from protracted crises.

Non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society should be fully involved in efforts to raise awareness on humanitarian issues.

We are happy that despite many constraints the United Nations has remained substantially involved in humanitarian assistance. The magnitude of United Nations involvement is apparent from the fact that during the during the 11-month period covered by the Secretary-General's report the United Nations provided assistance to 51 Member States in 77 emergency situations.

We are appalled by the fact that since 1992 139 United Nations civilian staff have been killed and 143 taken hostage while serving in operations around the world. We pay our sincere tribute to the courage and dedication of aid workers throughout the world, who daily put their lives at risk in order to bring vital assistance to those in need.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the humanitarian responses of the international community to natural disasters, environmental emergencies and other forms of crises should be viewed as inseparable components of development. We note in the report reference to recent experience demonstrating that the phases of relief, rehabilitation and development are not consecutive but overlap and often take place simultaneously. Moreover, relief and development cannot be seen in isolation from political and human rights contexts.

Bangladesh, as a victim of recurrent disasters, would like to emphasize that there is no arbitrary line dividing relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and long-term development. Our entire effort should be choreographed to face a single challenge: to attain development despite difficulties and drawbacks.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.